



Photos by Lydia Ely/The Astorian

**ABOVE:** The cast and crew of 'A Bag Full of Miracles' stand for a portrait during a rehearsal at the River City Playhouse in Ilwaco. **RIGHT:** Director and cast member Rita Smith, back, sound engineer Fred Carter, center, and assistant director and cast member Robert Scherrer, right, look at stage notes during a rehearsal.

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they are just great — they just jumped right in," Smith said.

But these changes presented challenges for Smith, who is directing her 14th musical. In "Miracles," Bette Lu Krause plays a widow desperate for income after a lawyer has swindled her. She teams up with a retired teacher, played by Smith. Barry Sears plays a crooked attorney and Nancy McAllister plays a woman targeted as his next victim.

Sears, a fixture of community theater on both sides of the Columbia, was Smith's choice for her replacement male lead. That posed one obstacle. "Barry doesn't sing. He's just a joy, but has no sense of rhythm," Smith said. "He has one song, but he is a hard worker, and he is up there alone with his song, and he doesn't want to embarrass," she added.

After the departure of another cast member, actor Kevin Perry took on a second role in the play. Smith laughed when asked about directing him. "It has been a challenge, because they are completely different characters. I told him to play one like Charlie Chaplin, but it's community theater. It works," Smith said.

David Immel and Robert Scherrer, who teamed as Royal Navy officers in the troupe's "H.M.S. Pinafore" a few years ago, each play significant roles. Ed Ahlers, who has directed for the Peninsula Players, portrays a forgetful radio preacher, and Rose Power, another stalwart, plays a loud woman who catches his eye. Sue Skinner plays the radio man's helper.

Completing the cast are Deborah Perry, Aarin Hygaard, Pepper Weldon, Skyler Asher, Natasha Beals, Michele Gutierrez, Gretchen Goodson and Suzanne Knutzen.

Scherrer, the play's assistant director, is delighted that the troupe is back. "There is always excitement and anticipation when making a selection of a play, casting, rehearsals and the actual performances," Scherrer said. "When we have new people express interest in joining the group, whether it be someone with experience or never having been on the stage, these levels are increased tremendously. It's hard to describe the exhilaration I feel when watching a new person beam with enjoyment when hearing the audience's reaction to what they are doing," he added.

Scherrer is eager for opening night. "We are always hoping by involving so many people, on or off the stage, that we are enriching their lives. The COVID break definitely caused a void in many of us. We are certainly excited to replace that void now that we are reopening our theater," he said.



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